Butler

No. 8

Copy

Charlottenburg-Berlin, Sept. 18th, 1914.
Nussbaumallee 24.

Dear Madam:

I appreciate the honour that you show me in wishing to hear my opinion concerning the causes of the present world-war. I do not hesitate for a moment to comply with your request.

The Russian Empire, like every 'Weltreich' (world-empire) has uncertain boundary-lines. Every attempt to secure these boundaries through an extension of them leads, as is always the case with a Weltreich, to new uncertainties and to new attempts at further extension. Ever since Russia's existence she has been in constant dispute with her neigbours concerning her boundaries—with Sachalin, Mongolia, Persia, Armenia, Bessarabia, and the Balkans. The "legacy of Peter the Great", a term which Napoleon invented either to deride or to compromise Russian politics, fixed in truth a goal for Russia and her boundary-line. Her role of protectorate over the Slavic nations in the Balkan Peninsula is closely connected with her scheme of gaining Constantinople, and for thus rounding off her dominion over the countries bordering on the Black Sea. In the exercise of her role of protectorate Russia has always met with the continued, persistent resistance of France and England. Toward the middle of the 19th century, as the "allied West Powers", they even went so far as to wage the Crimean War. Austria-Hungary and Germany, being immediate neighbours of Russia, have a vital interest in the question. There are from 5 to 6 million Servians among the Slavic races in Austria-Hungary, in a word, more than in Servia itself. It could not be anything but absolutely fatal to Austria-Hungary for aspirations toward a "Greater Servia" to be fostered in the Balkan States and to be carried westward. To what a degree Russia's desire for extension and dominion has weighed on her other European neighbour, Germany, is perhaps best seen from the attitude of the old Emperor and of Bismarck. Military and political tradition had instilled in them a firm belief in the "lofty friendship" of Russia; and yet in their old age they were compelled to make the cardinal point of their politics, protection against Russia's endeavours toward aggrandizement. The German-Austrian offensive and defensive alliance of October 7th, 1879, differs from all other European "ententes" in that it is worded: "The two states pledge each other to full assistance in arms against any attack from Russia." For 35 years this alliance fulfilled its aim; it restrained Russia from making war on its western neighbours, and it enabled them to carry on a peaceful course of politics.

Our relations with England have been of an entirely different character. As long as there has been an independent Prussian-German policy—and that is for about

250 years—we have never been at enmity with England. When the Prussian and English armies have met on the battle-field, it has always been as allies against a common enemy. Not even in our time has there been a single point in all the wide world where the political interests of Germany and England have clashed. But for about two decades now a spirit of uneasiness has been felt in England in the industrial field. Side by side with English industry, which formerly in the security of its strength strenuously advocated the program of free trade, younger industries of other nations have grown up, threatening serious competition to England in all parts of the globe. None of these industries has developed more quickly and more surely than that of Germany, for which reason England's uneasiness has been particularly directed toward her. English trade found itself in the position of a well-to-do, comfortable old gentleman who gets peevish because his young rival has faster legs than he. This industry rejects free competition, the means through which it formerly attained its greatness, and through which now its vigor might be reinforced. It cries out for protective tariff, thus exposing its weakness and forfeiting its prestige. Not even those who still cling to the program of free trade in England dare to combat their hatred of the competitor with an appeal to their countrymen for earnest industrial work; they try other means to cripple and annihilate their troublesome rivals. Hence the strange fashion in which the English parties outbid each other in hatred. While the Protectionists only wanted a tariff war, the Liberals must needs conceive the idea of a war with powder and shot. It would be childish to assert that England prepared directly for war with Germany. England's only interest was to bring about a coalition of annihilating force against Germany, and to burn her own fingers as little as possible. That is the meaning of "Einkreisungs-Politik". Since Edward VII.'s reign English politics have given up all traditional aims and have directed every effort toward stirring up enmity against Germany. England's position in the Orient depended upon her, as a Protestant power, according no more recognition to Catholic France in her role of protectorate over the Christians of the East than to the pretensions of Greek-Orthodox Russia. Since the days of Napoleon England has fortified her influence in the Orient by preserving friendly relations with the Sultan. This position England has now sacrificed; she has lost her prestige in the Mohammedan world; in Persia she has had to pave the way for Russia almost to the gates of India. Her Russian friendship became so dangerous in Central Asia that she had to condescend to an alliance with Japan, as a counterbalance against her new friend. For a while England contented herself with strengthening the anti-German, Russian-French alliance by her gracious patronage; but then to egg the alliance on to its anti-German goal she had at last to enter it herself and make of it an entente and a triple-alliance. I do not believe that England expected to have to face the consequences of her policy and herself take part in a bloody war. The unforeseen events of this year, however, proved too strong for her, and having sowed the wind she was not able to withstand the whirlwind when it came.

On June 28th the successor to the throne of Austria, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and bis wife were murdered in the open streets of Serajewo, the capital city of Bosnia. An investigation of the murder revealed a conspiracy which had its seat in Servia. The Servian Government itself and members of the Servian army were found to be implicated in the murder and in a proposed revolt of the Servian provinces in Austria. Upon the strength of these facts the Austrian Government, on July 23rd, sent a number of formulated demands to Servia. This note of Austria to Servia had a twofold purpose. On the one hand, through the humiliating form in which it was couched, it was to compel Servia to a moral confession of her complicity; on the other hand, it was to create a guarantee for the punishment of the guilty parties, and against the recurrence of similar events.

Although Servia's answer, which had to be given within 48 hours, was equal to a confession of guilt, the Servian Government had the audacity, through misleading diplomatic terms of expression, to attempt an evasion of the second demand made by Austria. Europe was of one accord in the opinion that Servia's evasion was based upon her reliance on Russia; but at the time Russia was not looked upon as a power prepared for war. An experience such as Russia had in her war with Japan is not so easily forgotten. External war meant internal revolution; everywhere, in Finland, in the Baltic provinces, in Poland, even in the central cities of the empire the spirit of revolution was felt as soon as the region was deprived of troops. In Germany it was known that the Russian war-party did not look to the Czar as its head, but to certain grand-ducal personages. These personages placed their reliance on the army and its very considerable efforts toward reorganisation since the Japanese war. During the Servian-Austrian conflict they managed indeed to mobilize one army-corps after another. But in their efforts they ran up against the undeniable fact that since the ignominious annihilation of the Russian fleet off the Tsusima Islands, nothing of consequence had been done to create a Russian navy capable of battle. The decision, therefore, now devolved upon England. She could either abandon her desire to crush Germany, or, through participation in the war, supply the Russian war-party with the missing fleet. The English Cabinet chose the latter alternative. With England's pledge to place her forces at their disposal, in case of a Russian and French declaration of war, the success of the Russian war-party was determined. While the German Kaiser and his government were corresponding with the Czar and the Russian Foreign Secretary in an ardent endeavour to keep the peace, Russia gave peaceful answers, denied mobilization, and continued to mobilize. As late as July 29th the Secretary of War and the Chief of the Staff in Petersburg gave their sacred word of honour that up to that hour (3 o'clock p.m.) no mobilization, that is, not the mustering of a single man or a single horse had taken place. In Berlin, however, there arrived at the same time with this word of honour an authentic report to the contrary: viz., that the Russian draughting of troops was directed not only towards the Austrian but also towards the German frontier. On July 31st the German ambassador in Petersburg received instructions to demand an immediate cessation of these hostile indications, and if in 12 hours he did not receive a satisfactory answer, to declare the German Government in a state of warfare with Russia. The best proof that this report was purely and simply the confirmation of an already established fact is to be seen from the fact that the official report of the ambassador never reached Berlin because telegraphic communication had already been cut off by Russia. While Russia was thus acting as if war with Germany were a settled fact, French military monoplanes appeared above Nuremberg proving that France's conception of her duty as ally was such that she believed she might participate in the war without previous declaration. On Sunday, August 2nd, the first official day of mobilization in Germany, Servia, Russia, and France on the one side, and Austria-Hungary and Germany on the other, were in a state of warfare.

Some days ago a report was published which the Belgian chargé d'affaires in Petersburg—certainly an unexceptionable witness—made on July 30th to the Belgian minister. This report bears testimony, first of all, that Germany made every endeavour in Vienna, as well as in Petersburg, to avoid a general conflict. Further, it bears emphatic testimony that the Russian war-party which wanted war, carried its point only after England had promised to lend assistance with her navy. In conclusion it bears testimony, with all the clearness that is compatible with the traditional etiquette of diplomatic circles, that the Russian assurances of there being no mobilization carried on against

Germany were not in accordance with the truth, and that the postponement of a declaration of war was solely for the purpose of obtaining more time for final preparations.

This is the history of the origin of the war, for which you have asked me. The Russian war-party wanted to go to war; it wanted nothing else. England would undoubtedly have preferred to see Russia and France undertake the butchering of us alone; but as there was no way out of it she was finally compelled to place the fleet of Trafalgar at their disposal. France, however, was not consulted at all—through the continual toasts of her ministers and presidents she had become so bound, that she was simply disposed of. It was not even considered necessary to consult the wishes of this once so proud nation.

Curious reports seem to have been spread in foreign countries concerning the events of the war up to the present time. Most of the things that are said about us we do not even know, and the few that we hear we are not able to contradict because England has cut our cables and intercepted the mail boats. It seems as if legends have arisen in England and France in which facts are allowed to play no part. Knowing that we had to fight simultaneously on our Eastern and our Western frontier, there was but one thing for our army to do and that was to carry on the campaign first on French soil. Here we have forced our way flanking France's famous outer ring of fortresses; the theatre of war is pushed toward the inner ring; the English auxiliary corps has been defeated, three times, and almost annihilated. This is the truth about the "defeats" which have been so much dwelt upon in the foreign press. These "defeats" have allowed us to reinforce our Eastern army, to drive the Russians out of East-Prussia, and to occupy the Russian frontier provinces. Among the first Russian prisoners East-Sibirians were found: an irrefutable proof that mobilization had been going on for a considerable time.

In the cartridge-bags of French and English prisoners, also in their ammunition wagons, dum-dum bullets have been found. These bullets are so constructed that they not only make wounds but tear into the flesh and intestines. In order to divert attention from the discovery of this hideous fact the enemy has hurled aspersions at us through the European press. But through the agency of the war office in Berlin any foreign journalist may see the captured dum-dum cartridges. On the other hand nobody who has dared charge us with a like offence, can produce German dum-dum bullets.— In Louvain our troops were overwhelmed with shots fired from machine-guns by an organization concealed in the various houses. And yet, notwithstanding this, our soldiers, under a steady fire from the murderous inhabitants of Louvain, with entire portions of the city standing in flames, brought out the fire-engines in order to rescue the magnificent city hall from the fire. The city hall and the cathedral stand there, undemolished monuments to the self-control of our soldiers even in a combat against treachery.

Also this war seems to have given occasion to foreign countries to pass judgment on our interior affairs. At the same time that England, forsaking all tradition, called upon the much-despised yellow race to make an attack upon us, at the same time that England and France were marching shoulder to shoulder with Russian despotism, we heard them cry out that their coalition was a defence of civilization against barbarism; because in Germany "militarism" prevails. To contradict the assertion that Russia represents civilization and the people of Kant and Goethe, barbarism, would indeed be a waste of time and breath. But a certain double meaning attaches to the word "militarism" which polemical writers migth use to advantage, if a stop be not put to their proceedings. The word "militarism" seems to be a familiar one to them from the daily papers and the

speeches in Parliament of our Opposition party. What we in Germany understand by this word, are complaints concerning specific evils in connection with the army; for instance, that officers and reserve officers sometimes play a more important role with us than is necessary; that in all branches of government administration too great a number of positions are reserved for military candidates; or, if you like, that in the ball room the brass buttons cause too much of a flutter in the hearts of the fair. Mr. Asquith as an Englishman will fully understand that we do not desire assistance from foreign countries for reform in our own fatherland, even if we consider reform necessary. Even in the eyes of the strictest member of the Opposition, however, this necessity for reform has absolutely nothing to do with what England means when she speaks of German militarism— with the fact that we are able to collect at one time an army of from 5 to 6 million men and even more. The strength of our army has not a single opponent in all Germany. Even the extremest Radical who wishes a militia instead of our present system, emphazises the fact that that would produce a still larger army, as indeed has proved to be the case in Switzerland. With us everybody is a soldier. That the Kaiser is also one, unites him to the sons of the people. That the Head of the State can send his army to the battle-field, holding himself aloof from the fire, may happen in London, in "Petrograd", in Paris, and even in Bordeaux; it can not happen in Berlin. Only the venerable age of our ally justifies him in the eyes of his people in remaining remote from battle; and he, not able to go himself, sends a second and a third generation into the field. Our enemies are in absolute ignorance of what general conscription means with us. We are the only people in the world who have had this organization for more than a century. To us it is the oldest democratic organisation of our government. Since 1688 the Englishman has clung timidly to the belief that the king can not keep an army without degenerating into a despot, and from year to year parliament graciously grants to the king permission, to have for a twelvemonth an army of mercenaries. Fearlessly we place the largest army in the world at the disposal of our sovereign, even in times of peace, for our army is identical with our people. We sing to-day the song of Ernst Moritz Arndt, that hero of freedom: "The God who let iron grow, wanted no slaves." Universal conscription is our Magna Charta. Compulsory education, universal suffrage, universal conscription form a bulwark of strength for our people and guarantee for their cooperation in public life. In our relations, however, with foreign lands universal conscription means that Germany can carry on no war, unless the people are convinced of its justice in the deepest depths of their hearts.

From the day of the declaration of war there has been but one opinion in Germany— we are waging war against "Czarism" and for our existence. We would be an easy prey for a Russia that had conquered Austria-Hungary. There are no two opinions in Germany on this subject, and there never will be. The war loan of 5 millard marks (a sum which has never been demanded of a German Parliament before) was voted by the German Reichstag unanimously and without debate; also all the laws for interior administration during the war. Germany has the strongest and most oppositional Social-Democracy in the world. The Social-Democratic party enters into this war for the existence of the nation like every other party. A well-known member of the Social-Democratic party, Dr. Frank, was the first from the ranks of the Reichstag to offer his services as a volunteer, and the first to die for his country. The Conservatives, nay, the Reactionaries are proud of the bearing of the Social-Democrats. The dictatorial power of authority with which we have invested our government the Liberals endure with ease. The differences of political points of view are forgotten. The behaviour

of the Alsatians is splendid, and the Poles throng like all others to battle against "Czarism" which they have always looked upon as their worst enemy. Though but young at the time I witnessed the enthusiasm of 1870. At that time we were a people seeking for unity; to-day we are a people strengthened by unity.

You see, my dear Madam, the nature of the facts is such that it is not necessary for me to avail myself of your offer of discretion. I have nothing to say which I am not willing to say under my own name, and I authorize you to make such use of my statements as may seem expedient to you. I seem to have written you an epistle to-day instead of a letter.

I remain,

Yours very faithfully,

Dr. Jastrow,

Professor at the University of Berlin.